

THE ACCUSED PRISONER

An Inauguration Romance

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The Story of Booth's First Attempt to Assassinate Lincoln

By Paul C. Neville

INTRODUCTION

Startling Historical Facts on which this Thrilling Romance is Founded

After Lincoln was elected President and before he was inaugurated on March 4, 1861, it was publicly predicted that he would never live to be sworn in as President, and open threats were made that he would be assassinated before he was inaugurated. The secret service agents of the government discovered a well-laid plot to murder him on his journey from his home in Springfield, Ill., to Washington. The plot involved a large number of well-organized conspirators, some of whom were to follow him on his journey and kill him at various favorable points along the route for the same purpose. Baltimore, through which Lincoln had to pass, was the head center of the plot and was the point of greatest danger, as the population and some of the authorities of that city were so hostile to him that it was determined to mob his car and kill him openly in the mix up as his train stopped in Baltimore, in case all previous efforts failed. While this was known to the government detectives and to Lincoln's friends, fatal evidence could not be obtained to warrant the arrest of the conspirators, so Lincoln was closely guarded by his friends who accompanied him on the journey, and much against his will he was induced to change trains and pass through Baltimore in disguise. He thus narrowly escaped assassination on his way to Washington.

Even in Washington there was almost as great, as the prevailing sentiment of Washington was nearly as hostile as that of Baltimore, and the conspirators were firmly resolved to kill him before the close of inauguration day. Besides the plot of a secret attempt on his life there was great danger of a riot on the streets of Washington and an open attack on him during the inauguration. So threatening was the situation that General Scott, commander in chief of the U. S. Army, issued a proclamation, took personal command of the city and stationed an army at the street corners, lined the route of the inaugural procession with soldiers and posted sharpshooters on the housetops, patrolled all the streets with troops and put a strong guard in and about the Capitol building. Between his arrival in Washington and the inaugural Lincoln lived at the Willard Hotel under guard and watched over by volunteer friends and secret service detectives. On inauguration day he was driven from the hotel to the White House in a closed carriage with the curtains drawn so that he could not be seen and was accompanied by a strong guard. From there he drove openly in the state carriages accompanied by the retiring President to the Capitol surrounded by a large body of picked troops led by a fine company of mounted men from the U. S. Engineer corps. Arrived at the Capitol, he was conducted from the carriage through a subterranean tunnel into the building so as to avoid the danger of passing through the crowd.

So great was the alarm that the U. S. regulars and marines available were not considered sufficient. In number to cope with the situation and the District of Columbia militia was called into service to supplement the regular troops. The regulars and marines were absolutely reliable, but the District Militia contained some hot-headed young men violently hostile to Lincoln. It was a situation mostly forgotten now and hardly believable at the present day, but it is true. Washington was almost in a state of panic and presented the appearance of a military camp in time of war. Thanks to these extreme precautions and vigorous measures on the part of Lieut. Gen. Winfield Scott everything passed off peacefully and no hostile demonstration was attempted.

until they reached the very top and emerged on the platform, from which could be seen the beautiful city lying out before them like one in miniature.

"Well," the officer said tensely. "Although there had been but the mildest of spring breezes on the Capitol steps, here up so far above the city the wind was so strong that the girl was forced to place her lips almost against his ear in order to make herself heard without raising her voice."

"All is in readiness. The deed will be done here, if these mean fellows fail."

"How here?" the Captain whispered back, his face through the closely cut beard showing ghastly white.

"Listen, for these are the only instructions you will receive. Today is Saturday, March 2. Tonight you will be handed a forged pass to Sergeant Brown. He is one of us and can be fully trusted. It will be your duty to admit John Wilkes Booth through the tunnel which you will be guarding. See that he may get a place on the platform behind Lincoln. All interest will center upon this Illinois rail-splitter, and Jack can shoot him from behind and escape in the confusion which is sure to follow. The very audacity of the plan gives best promise of success. Old Scott is so careful who he issues the passes to that no one will look for trouble from the speaker's platform."

Desperately as he was in sympathy with this

when he is known to be so bitter against the principles advocated by the Republican party?

A strange, bright smile flitted over the girl's beautiful face.

"One question at a time. You remember that Jack is an actor? You remember that he can assume almost any part, yes and act it to perfection. He is an expert at disguises and make-ups. Now it is proposed that he shall be disguised as a beautiful young woman; one who comes with a pass signed by Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott. How are you to penetrate the disguise or suspect that the pass is forged?"

"But this is awful!" he finally stammered. "I never planned for murder, I only thought of abduction."

"The girl drew back a little her eyes flashing a living flame."

"Are you a coward? What good would it do to abduct Lincoln? He would soon be rescued and we should hang on to go to prison for it. Have you no conception of what is involved? Let this man be inaugurated and war will result. The whole land will be drenched with blood. Brothers will rise against brothers; fathers against sons; families will be divided, and the whole world will stand against, and you and John Wilkes Booth can prevent it all. What is one life against that of thousands? George Washington was the man of the hour, the great victor for whom you were named, I command you to remember that lies within your power. You are given the destiny of a nation to make or break. Will you be false to the trust reposed in you?"

and then as though this appeal, false to the very core in its ingenious expediency, were not enough to sway the indomitable loyalty of the young man by her side, she leaned still closer and whispered:

"You have spoken to me of love. Do you think I would not know how to reward the man who was brave enough to tempt would be for the man who was a coward?" and then as the man started and tried to clasp her in his arms, she said softly:

"Remember George, the whole of Washington is looking at us," pointing laughingly at the city beyond.

"If I carry out my part of the bargain you will marry me," he cried, his voice broken, his face mad with love of her and the strange fanaticism which was never fully understood by him.

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who have been loyal and level-headed enough to keep without the pernicious influence of conspiracy.

"My hand and heart will go to him who succeeds," was the quick reply, and Captain Leclercque had to be content with that oracular pronouncement. George Washington Leclercque bent his head and pressed a kiss upon the unglowed hand of the woman who was tempting him, and said in a deep, low voice:

"Wherever you direct my lady, I will go, even if it be to the gallows," and her eyes flashed forth a triumphant light, for she had conquered.

"But," she told him as she gave him a few more instructions, "we must keep Booth's lips sealed. Warn him to stop his indiscrete predictions. He was ranting today to that preloved brother-in-law-to-be of yours as I interrupted."

"Surely, Captain you must keep a watchful eye on that gentleman who is about to enter your family. If it should in any way get an idea of the way his strategy is blowing, he might send us all to the state of that instrument of martyrdom you have so lately mentioned. You may be willing to mount it for my sake, but I do not think you would care to be sent there by him, eh?" and her laugh had an evil sound.

The man shrugged. "I do feel extremely angered against Edward Thompson who is in it. It was beyond any suspicion, a gallant, true-hearted officer, proud of his country, and loyal to his duty. While these two are planning murder, Lieutenant Thompson was guiding his beloved home to the steady manly life of nearly half a century. As they passed into the house an aged dandery came into his hot bowing and pulling at his forelock."

"Why Missie, Hody Massa Ned," he kept saying until Clarissa asked with some astonishment:

"Why Cato how is it that you have not gone as I ordered you to? I want all the Jasmine in I can get. I'm going to trim the whole house in it for the Fourth, that glorious day, Ned. I'm going to have to run down to the market and plantation and get me wagon loads. What do you think of it?" and her soft dark eyes glowed with the thought of it.

"Then my gown is to be all yellow, just like the dear flower, and I will put my whole heart to the styling matter. I will do my best, but I did not go," and she turned towards him, but displaying no anger. It was said of her that she could not get on her feet.

The old man explained that he had been fixing up the horses, but that he was going that afternoon, and as he called it, and after the Lieutenant had tossed him a coin he left howling and bestowing thanks enough to over-people one not used to the enthusiastic exaggeration of the simple blacks, and the two lovers strolled into the elegantly furnished parlor, where they had spent so many happy hours. As they walked back to the old-fashioned black horse-hair sofa, there was a scuffle at the door and then several yelps of joy and two immense bloodhounds came bounding in to jump about the two, who fondled them, and spoke to the intelligent dogs as though they understood every word spoken to them. These two, Bruno and Rex, loved Ned as much as they did Clarissa, and obeyed both equally. When Clarissa told them to lie down, they stretched themselves between the two, and lay there, with eyes half closed, their tails beating a regular melody on the brass carpet where immense pink roses in great wreaths stood boldly on the gray background.

"And to think they could be so fierce," Clarissa whispered, for not two weeks before her brother had used them to hunt an escaped negro, who had taken refuge in the Great Diamond Swamp.

"Never think of that darling," the young officer pleaded, stopping to reverently raise her chin and gaze into her sweet eyes, "because I want to plead my cause today."

"What cause, Ned?" she asked, blushing prettily.

"I want to beg you to tell me when I can put another ring on your hand," he whispered, raising her right hand to his lips, the little hand upon the forefinger of which gleamed an exquisite ring set with a large flawless diamond of the first water. This jewel was an heirloom through generations in the Thompson family and Clarissa prized it next to life and love. It was her engagement ring.

The other little hand looks lonely," he whispered, drawing it into his own. "I want to put a plain gold ring on it. When can I tell me, my love. What date shall be engraved inside it?"

The girl hesitated. She loved the boy who had grown up with her, who had fought all her battles, who had given her of his best ever since when a child of five he had seen the tiny girl of one. She recognized the fact that once they were engaged he wanted to claim her as his bride, but she felt too young, too immature, and she tried to explain to him.

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"HAT tyrant will never be inaugurated, mark my words, Edward Thompson."

"Not inaugurated? Booth you are talking rank nonsense to give me a thrasher nurse, but then the speaker laughed, although there was a dash in his ear, blue eyes. Lincoln has escaped his powerful enemies and would-be murderers and is now in Washington safe under protection of General Scott, who has the situation perfectly in hand."

"I am not theatrical, Ned," the first speaker said earnestly holding his wild, dark eyes upon the face of his companion as they stood half way up the steps of the capitol, that bright morning, March 2, 1861. "I am speaking sober earnest when I say that Abraham Lincoln will never be permitted to assume control of the Nation. If he were to be inaugurated, there would be war, bitter, cruel war."

"Then war there will be, Jack, for as surely as the sun rises the fourth of March, Abraham Lincoln," here he saluted, "will be inaugurated President of the people who elected him."

The other spoke his mind, then raising his right hand of which he was always so inordinately proud, he said gravely, while his dark eyes seemed almost starting from his head:

"So said another tyrant who fell by the hand of the inspired assassin. When it is all over, Ned remember the idea of March, and with these words, which later were to form a part of the diary found upon his person when he was miserably shot and captured, the speaker during the end of the military cape much affected in those days across his shoulder and strode rapidly down the broad, white steps."

His companion who wore the uniform of a Lieutenant of Company C, First Regiment, District of Columbia Militia, stood looking after him muttering:

"Poor Jack, his head is fairly turned by his acting and Southern sentiments," but he was interrupted by a clear, silvery voice which cried in his ear:

"And can anything interest this Son of Mars aside from the lovely Clarissa?" and turning his eyes met a pair of saucy ones peeping from among a confusion of golden curls.

Instantly the brilliant young owner doffed his cap and stood bareheaded in the soft spring breeze. He was handsome enough to attract the attention of any woman, but the one who thus addressed him cared little for his manly beauty, for already she was deep in conspiracy, for she was one of those women who were to worry President Lincoln and his advisors nearly out of all reason during the mighty struggle which ensued.

"Do you know Jack Booth?" the young officer asked, a smile breaking over his face, for she was very lovely, and dainty, and his heart was ten-der towards all women on account of his love for fair Clarissa Leclercque to whom he had been betrothed for nearly a month.

"Slightly," she returned, "my future step, and I have heard the old act, let me be an ideal. Booth? Eh?" and her saucy laugh rang out, reaching the ears of a gloomy appearing young man who wore the uniform of a captain in the same company as Lieutenant Thompson, in fact he was his superior officer. Clinging to his arm was the girl who had assumed control of young Thompson's heart, Clarissa Leclercque.



"MAN, DO YOU KNOW WHOM YOU ARE ADDRESSING?"

"And what are they doing to bother?" the captain asked between clenched teeth, then hurried on his lovely charge in time to interrupt the conversation with a brusque:

"Lieutenant will you take my sister home? She would come down with me. The streets of Washington are not fit place for ladies these stirring days," and while he bowed low to the golden-haired girl, the frown remained on her face.

Clarissa Leclercque's sweet face flushed slightly as she greeted the other woman, for her womanly instinct warned her against the fair one of whom she could not approve, although she knew nothing against her.

Lieutenant Thompson needed no urging to act as the escort of his lady love, and so giving her his arm he carried her off, his handsome face beaming with pleasure.

As they passed out of hearing, Captain Leclercque said with stately courtesy:

"May I not take you to a place of safety," but the girl shook her head and returned for the benefit of those who might be passing:

"No, Captain, but I wish you would take me to the top of the Capitol. I have the fancy to view this fair city from a height," and without a word the man obeyed for he recognized in her one of those high in the confidence of the conspirators with whom he was consorting. Yes, he was an officer in command of the militia who were to guard the safety of the president-elect, was conspiring against his life.

Silently the two climbed up the winding steps



TWO LITTLE MEN
HOUNDS CAME
BOUNDING IN.
"I WANT TO
PLEAD MY CAUSE
TODAY."

dreadful cause, Captain Leclercque could not help slandering, as he asked hoarsely:

"How can he escape? How can I admit Booth

C. H. WARREN

"YOU ARE COMPLETELY IN MY POWER. RESISTANCE IS USELESS."

THE ACCURSED PASS

An Inauguration Romance

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4.)

"Why dear Ned," she pleaded, "I only left boarding school at Christmas. I am barely seventeen, and you are only a boy yet."

"A boy!" he indignantly exclaimed. "Why, darling, I was old enough to have voted last fall if in the Federal Union. I could vote. I am older than your father when he married first, than yours when he married your mother."

"Yes I know, dear. But you are only a boy, and I a girl. Marriage is a very solemn thing, Ned."

"Dearest I do love you. I want my wife. My father needs his daughter. Our old home is gloomy, we want this dear, sweet little girl to brighten our lives for us. Daddy is getting to be an old man. See he was not a young man when I was born. Just think, Clarissa if his eldest child had lived he would have been older than my mother," and he sighed and wondered if that far-away first wife of his father who had been married so young was any more tenderly



"MY FAITH ASSURES ME HE WILL GIVE A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION."

beloved than the wife the old Mexican War veteran had espoused, who had died at the birth of her only child.

"I know, Ned, dear, but George needs me here," Clarissa pleaded.

"George will be giving this home another mistress before long unless I am mistaken," Ned said quietly, and Clarissa murmured the name of the golden-haired woman they had met on the steps of the Capitol.

Ned nodded. "If she will accept I think so, but never mind them, darling, tell me why can't we be married this spring? I am already asking there is going to be war. I am certain of it, and I will raise a company. My country is the dearest thing on earth to me aside from you, and I know you would not have me fall even though I love you," and he turned to her for confirmation.

"Never, dearest," I could not love you if you were not true to our country," she cried with that wonderful bravery women were to show for four dreary, terrible years, "but still I insist that until you prove that we are something more than boy and girl, I cannot marry you," and all his pleadings failed to move her. However, he felt sure that if war came he would be able to let him leave her until they were married, so Lieutenant Thompson finally left her and went on duty, for the militia was already assembling in keeping the turbulent populace in check. As he was passing along that night to resume his duties, Sergeant Brown, his company stopped him and saluted. The night was dark, the street poorly lighted, and as he was just the same light as Captain Leclercue, the Sergeant mistook him for the commanding officer.

Without a word he handed him an envelope and disappeared.

Wondering, Lieutenant Thompson thrust it into his tunic, and forgot about it until he was retiring, when he found it in his pocket, and taking it up he found it was unaddressed.

At first he was not going to open it, then he remembered it was sent by a man of his own company, so tearing it open he was astonished to find a pass made out for an unknown woman. The signature was well forged, but Ned had seen too much of General Scott's handwriting to be fooled. The old General sent his own father who had served under him in the Mexican war, corresponded frequently, and Ned knew the peculiar penmanship as well as he did his own.

"Brown took me for someone else," he muttered. "Who? for someone else, I think I was?" Then his face blanched. He had seen and read a good deal during the past month or so that had worried him, but he had attributed it to the intense disappointment of Leclercue who had hoped to be sent on a foreign mission had Douglas been elected. Understanding the state of affairs he readily recognized what a power for evil this forged pass in the hands of an unscrupulous person would be.

"Then made out in the name of an unknown woman. It has a bad look," he mused, wondering if he had better wait until morning, or go at once and deliver it to General Scott.

In the meantime Sergeant Brown went back to quarters met Corporal Haines who told him that Captain Leclercue had been waiting for him for nearly an hour. Frightened nearly out of his wits, the sergeant hurried into the tent to find Leclercue frowning and walking to and fro.

"Have you anything for me?" Leclercue cried when the trembling man stood before him.

"Captain, I am a fool with me," gasped the man, "didn't I meet you twenty minutes ago?"

"Meet me? Well, I have been here all this evening," was the quick reply, and Sergeant Brown staggered. He was frightened nearly out of his wits, as was his commanding officer.

"Gather yourself together," he cried with a terrible oath. "Whom did you deliver that message to?"

Brown could not tell definitely, but from the description, Leclercue decided it must be Thompson, and he sent Corporal Haines to find him. Ned was looking over the pass, his brows drawn together when the man appeared, and he thrust it back in his pocket, thinking it would be a good thing to have it with him. For Clarissa's sake he resolved to give her rascally brother a chance to get away.

The two men went together back to the Captain's tent, from Ned's own home, for he had been released for the night, and the lad's heart was heavy for he could scarcely bear to think of George as a traitor, one who would join in any conspiracy. Company C was encamped on the outside of the fort.

As they entered the Captain's tent, Leclercue rose and said in a low, tense voice:

"I think Ned you received something intended for me."

"I hope not," Lieutenant Thompson returned steadily. "I think it would about break my heart. I thought what I received was for you."

"I fall to understand you," was the early answer.

"George," Ned said quietly, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "you and I have been friends all our lives, and you know how I love Clarissa. Let me say you have seemed to draw away from us, George, I love you as though you were my older brother, as Clarissa will make us in love soon. Now listen. I am sure you do not understand the gravity of what misled friends are leading you into. Perhaps I am mistaken, you say I asked the pass for some friend of yours. But I know the old General's list as though it were my Bible. The signature to this pass is forged. Pretend you didn't expect it. Let's forget it all. I have heard and seen much, but dear Ned, but I will never remember any of it. Put all this disappointment aside, for there is going to be men's work for us soon, very soon. Put all this dishonesty and honorably defeated at the police. Recollect yourself to this, and let the past be buried," and he held out his hand, tears standing in his frank blue eyes.

George Leclercue looked at him for a minute, although he could not meet his gaze, then he called harshly:

"Corporal," and the two entered the Captain's tent.

"Search this man," he commanded, and in spite of Thompson's protest they went through him and found the forged pass.

"Lieutenant Thompson," the Captain said in a hard, cold voice, "I hope you can explain this. How does it come I find a formal accusation forged pass upon your person, made out in the name of an unknown woman, for a position on the staff of the General, and you are to be inaugurated? How will my sister bear the news, or what will she think of your unfaithfulness in thus providing for her ruin?"

"If you must be a scoundrel, George, for heaven's sake leave her name out of it," Ned said furiously.

"Men," Captain Leclercue said coldly, "I wish you to remember that this officer was found with his name on his person, but keep it to yourselves in case I decide not to lodge a formal accusation against him. I will keep the pass and deliver it where it will do the most good, and his name barred on a grain of sand. Sergeant, Lieutenant Thompson is under arrest. You and the Corporal will guard him until morning and let no one communicate with such a dangerous suspect."

Suddenly Ned remembered the strange words of the act. Once more he could see the dancing eyes peeping from between the golden curls of the woman, and something of the real state of affairs dawned upon him. He knew of the open threats to assassinate Lincoln on his way to Washington, the attempt to murder him as he passed through Baltimore, and Lincoln's escape by going in disguise through the Maryland neck. Washington was then a Southern city and almost as hostile as Baltimore.

"Oh, George, but warned in time. Save yourself, save us all," he pleaded.

"And the young man cried:

"Can you explain to me, Captain Leclercue, holding up the forged pass as he left the tent with a sarcastic smile."

"Ned," he explained, "the arrangements for the escape of Booth in case his attempt on Lincoln's life should be successful, the conspirators had a boat and men ready at the river near the boat across the Potomac, and men with horses on the Virginia side to hurry him to a deserted hut in a desolate bay through the Maryland neck. The derelict plantation on the edge of the wilderness region of Virginia. This hut had been provisioned for the desperadoes in that part of the country. About two hours before daylight the two boatsmen started for the capture."

Turning to Lieutenant Thompson, the Captain said: "These trusty friends are ready to take you. I will take you over the Potomac, where you will be safe, at least until after the fourth of March," he sneered.

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"Ned," he explained, "the arrangements for the escape of Booth in case his attempt on Lincoln's life should be successful, the conspirators had a boat and men ready at the river near the boat across the Potomac, and men with horses on the Virginia side to hurry him to a deserted hut in a desolate bay through the Maryland neck. The derelict plantation on the edge of the wilderness region of Virginia. This hut had been provisioned for the desperadoes in that part of the country. About two hours before daylight the two boatsmen started for the capture."

Turning to Lieutenant Thompson, the Captain said: "These trusty friends are ready to take you. I will take you over the Potomac, where you will be safe, at least until after the fourth of March," he sneered.

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Arrived at the hut they forced him in, closed the door and again bound his legs.

The cutthroats at the hut were much annoyed at being hampered in their plans by having Ned certain to lead to the capture of the traitor. They were there for the sole purpose of assisting Booth to escape and the presence of Ned might result in the failure of the plan, or even if Booth should make good his escape by their aid, when Ned finally got back to civilization, he would certainly lead to the capture of the traitor, and hanging. They finally came to the conclusion that they must get rid of him at once, on Monday morning, almost at daybreak. So they decided that if Leclercue should not send for Ned before night they would kill him. It was now the Sunday, and the inauguration would take place Monday.

Sunday morning, Captain Leclercue stood before General Scott, his face drawn, although behind his swollen. His eyes sparkled balefully, as he reported to his commander the fact that he had been obliged to arrest Lieutenant Thompson, who had listened to his captors and was now absent.

General Scott's thoughts were fully occupied with his plans for safe-guarding Abraham Lincoln, but his attention was caught by the Lieutenant's remark.

"Whom did you say?" he cried, all alert in a minute.

"Lieutenant Thompson," Captain Leclercue replied.

"Nonsense man why there is not a braver or more loyal man in the country than Ned Thompson," thought until last night, the traitor to friendship as well as duty, replied, "but I did covered otherwise," and he sighed.

"What is the charge?" the General asked bluntly.

"He left his post of duty during the night with an unknown woman, and on his return I arrested him," the Captain replied, and told the General the whole story, from the time Sergeant Brown and Corporal Haines, finally inducing them to smoke. Without doubt the cigars were smuggled to them by some one, and he wondered, "Man, do you know whom you are accusing?" thundered the old General.

"I am sure it will kill him," said Captain Leclercue said quietly, although he was secretly delighted to think that this would remove Thompson from the man he wanted his shaver to make. There was a man deep in the foul conspiracy, Leroy Strong, who had paid her ardent court ever since he had returned from boarding school, and even before when she was home on her vacations, but whom Clarissa could not endure.

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